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First record of Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* for Benin

Ben van Muyen

Première mention de la Mouette rieuse *Larus ridibundus* pour le Bénin. Le 6 février 2003, deux ou trois Mouettes rieuses *Larus ridibundus* en plumage adulte internuptial ont été observées dans les marais de Guézin, au Lac Ahémé, à environ 30 km de Grand Popo, près de la frontière du Togo, dans le sud Bénin (06°24'N 01°57'E). Cette donnée constitue la première pour le pays.

Between 29 January and 15 February 2003, Barend van Gemerden and I visited Benin at the invitation of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), Netherlands, to undertake a study on the relationship between field biology, ecotourism and nature conservation. In the afternoon of 6 February 2003, we were birdwatching at Guézin marshes, Lac Ahémé, c.30 km from Grand Popo,

near the Togolese border in south Benin (06°24'N 01°57'E). The weather was dry and the light excellent. We observed many species of wader, as well as two or three gulls, which were feeding actively by picking items from the water surface. Although we expected them to be Grey-headed Gulls *Larus cirrocephalus*, with which I have experience from The Gambia and South Africa, the rather pointed wings with the conspicuous white leading edge to

the outer wing made it immediately obvious that they were Black-headed Gulls *L. ridibundus*, with which we are both very familiar. We observed them on two or three occasions, each time for c.5 minutes, through 8 × 42 and 10 × 42 binoculars, and a 10 × 65 telescope.

The outer primaries were narrowly tipped black (Grey-headed Gull has a black wingtip bordered by a white diagonal bar). The rest of the upperwing was uniform grey and the tail white, indicative of adult plumage. The head was white with a dusky ear-spot and two faint bars across the crown, from eye to eye and from ear-spot to ear-spot (forming 'headphones'). In one bird the ear-spot was starting to increase in size, indicating that it was moulting from non-breeding to breeding plumage. The bill was slender and red, tipped black. The legs were red.

This is the first record of Black-headed Gull for Benin: the species does not feature on the list presented by Dowsett (1993), nor on the distribution map in Borrow & Demey (2001), and no records have been reported since (P. Claffey pers. comm.). The species is a Palearctic visitor to West African coasts, from Mauritania to Ghana (where uncommon: Grimes 1987), and also inland along the Niger River in Mali and west Niger, and in northern Nigeria (Hadejia-Nguru wetlands, Lake Chad area), southern Niger and Chad (Elgood *et al.* 1994, Borrow & Demey 2001, J. Brouwer pers. comm.). There is only one record from neighbouring Togo, from the north (Cheke & Walsh 1996), and six from Lagos, coastal Nigeria, involving 11 individuals in 1967–70 (Wallace 1973); the latter, mentioned in Elgood (1981),

were erroneously omitted from Elgood *et al.* (1994) (A. Moore *in litt.* 2005).

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